

An Alumni Association?

Employees of CIA work in an environment and under conditions unlike, and in many ways more demanding than, employees of perhaps any other department or agency. These conditions are in large part responsible for the fact that, for many, working with CIA becomes a way of life for the employee as well as his family. Ironically, when an employee separates from the Agency, except through retirement under the CIA Retirement System, his formal ties are cut absolutely. Even with regard to official matters growing out of his CIA service (annuity, insurance, etc.), he deals with other agencies of the Government, particularly the Civil Service Commission. The Agency has no systematic way of communicating with ex-employees, keeping current address lists, or fostering a continuing relationship of any kind.

For some who have worked long and faithfully, this sudden, complete, and total separation is traumatic. For most, there is a feeling of regret that the curtain is drawn and all formal communication is stopped. While the need is for some much greater than it is for others, almost certainly most would welcome some kind of continuing association with the Agency and a systematic way of keeping in touch with each other. In the absence of anything to nourish their loyalty to the Agency, it is reasonable to assume that their support as individuals and as a group will decrease with each passing year. Indeed, some who are strong supporters at separation will soon become neutral or even hostile.

There are approximately 35,000 former employees of CIA. Allowing for the rapid turnover in clericals and others who have served only a short period of time, there are probably some 10,000 ex-employees who devoted a considerable part of their working lives to CIA. Most of them were at separation loyal to the Agency, believed in its mission, and wished it well. If some way could be found, within the bounds of good security, to maintain at least the goodwill, and hopefully the active support, of this group and those to follow, it would almost certainly redound to the benefit of the Agency.

The Agency should take a good hard look at itself and see if it shouldn't do a better job of fostering a continuing relationship of some

- 2 -

kind with its ex-employees. It has been suggested that employees at separation be permitted to continue their membership in the Employee Activity Association, which would in turn send out a newsletter from time to time. Another suggestion is that the Office of Personnel should have a Retired Affairs Division which would communicate and deal with and be responsive to retired personnel (or ex-employees). In either case, the newsletter might, for example, contain a synopsis of the Court's opinion in the Marchetti case or the President's recent remarks about the CIA and the drug traffic. These suggestions ought to be looked at regardless of what is done about an Alumni Association.

These suggestions were made to substitute for an Alumni Association, but let us assume that an Agency-sponsored activity, run from within the Agency Headquarters, is not a completely satisfactory answer. On the surface, an Alumni Association like the Society of Former Special Agents of the FBI or the Navy League, organized and operated without appropriated funds, would seem to be a good idea. The problems of cover, security, compartmentation, the attitude of the public media toward CIA make our problem quite different from that of the ex-FBI Agents' Society or the Navy League. In fact, it is quite unique.

Opinion among senior active duty CIA personnel as to whether an Alumni Association would be an asset or a liability to the Agency is sharply divided -- and not along organizational lines. It should also be said that, while the ex-Clandestine Services employee probably has the greatest need and desire for such an organization, he also poses some of the greatest problems in connection with it.

Any such society would in all probability have a roster with current addresses of all of its members. It must be assumed that this would eventually get to the press. There are some who feel that no one who has ever been under cover could be listed. They say that, even if such a roster disclosed nothing new to the opposition, our cover agencies would hold us up to ridicule and would be less cooperative in arranging new and maintaining old cover. Others think this is nonsense and that only deep-cover people need to be excluded from the

- 3 -

roster. One suggestion, made in part to get around the cover problem, was to have an "Intelligence Society of America" with eligibility for membership pretty wide open. I found no support for this idea. In fact, I think there is a consensus that, if there is to be such an Alumni Association, let it be made up of ex-employees of CIA only.

There is genuine concern about how the press would treat such an organization. If the society or its members speak out in support of the Agency, especially when it is under attack, will not the press play up this "Alumni of Spooks" as a tool of CIA -- an extension of its "illegal domestic activities" to propagandize and subvert the public? Others think this fear is exaggerated. They say this kind of publicity comes and goes quickly, has no lasting effect, etc. This concern is nevertheless without question the greatest single reservation held by those who are negative about the proposition.

Those who favor some such organization recognize the problem about rosters, cover, keeping out the disloyal, etc. They simply feel that the whole thing would be a net plus for the Agency and that the problems can be dealt with once the decision is made to go ahead. It should be added that there are some very strong feelings in this group that some kind of an Association is a must.

There is also some feeling that some such organization will eventually come into being whether or not the Agency wants it. Far better, they say, to get the right people to start it in the manner most satisfactory to the Agency than to wake up some morning and find you have a millstone around your neck. There is some reason to believe that local chapters may be organized if some national leadership doesn't eventuate. This might not be a bad way to start, except it could prove troublesome if at a later date an attempt was made to pull them together under national leadership.

If such an organization is formed, it must not expect support from appropriated funds. It will, however, want and need the Agency's close, informal cooperation. It will need to consult about membership, rosters, the selection of key officers, etc. It will need Agency contribution to its newsletter. It will probably request speakers for

- 4 -

business and social gatherings. It could request that an annual meeting be conducted on Agency premises. Whatever form it takes, the Agency is bound to get involved.

To maintain an office with a full-time secretary and pay for some printing and mailing would probably cost about \$25,000 per year. (This assumes that most of the officers would give considerable time to the Association without compensation.) This would require, say, 2,500 members paying dues of \$10.00 per year. After a year or two, they'll start asking questions about what they are getting for their dues. The Association must do something to maintain their interest and support. To make it go, there will need to be newsletters, rosters, periodic business and social gatherings, etc., and they will need to feel that the Association is in close touch with CIA.

If an Alumni Association is started and then fizzles out after a year or two, it will have been counterproductive. If we want to do it, we should make sure we've got a few people who will see it through and make it go. Otherwise, we would be well advised not to stir the pot.